

PERSONAL NARRATIVES
OF EVENTS IN THE
WAR OF THE REBELLION,
BEING PAPERS READ BEFORE THE
RHODE ISLAND SOLDIERS AND SAILORS
HISTORICAL SOCIETY.

No. 12. SECOND SERIES.



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A

CRUISE ALONG THE BLOCKADE.

BY

F R A N K B . B U T T S ,

[FORMERLY PAYMASTER'S CLERK UNITED STATES NAVY.]



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A CRUISE ALONG THE BLOCKADE.

[READ BEFORE THE SOCIETY, NOVEMBER 13, 1878.]

Fifteen years ago, or September 5th, 1863, I was discharged from the United States service with all the honors of having served my country both as a sailor and a soldier. My last year's service had been so filled with the toil and perils of war, that I firmly resolved to stay at home and let those serve their country whose patriotism had never been singed by rebel powder, or rocked to sleep on the stormy ocean at the mast-head of a blockading vessel. I could not, however, keep my resolutions, and after a very welcome reception by my relatives and friends, the pleasure of being at home wore away. For enjoyment, I strolled about the camps and rendezvous of the newly organized regiments. Everybody was talking soldier

and was very sympathetic for those in the field, but I found that the stories of sharpshooters' bullets had quieted the patriotism of those at home who were able to become soldiers, and one thousand dollars and upwards had to be paid for recruits, with an assurance that their regiment would never do any fighting, and a guarantee that they were never made to stop a bullet. I was offered several positions to enter the service again, and finally accepted an appointment as paymaster's clerk in the United States Navy, and was ordered to the steamer "Flag," then at Charlestown Navy Yard, fitting out for the blockade. My idea at that time of the duties of a blockading vessel were not different from those of people generally, who thought all that would be expected of us would be to lie at anchor at the entrance of a city or harbor and wait for some mammoth English steamer to run into us, and then we would divide the prize-money.

I reported on board the ship "Flag," December 4th, 1863, and the short time given me in my orders necessitated my muster into the service in citizen's dress, and I can now almost feel my shame as I saw

the winks and smiles which were exchanged among the officers, who evidently took me for some country dandy. But after I had made a visit to a ready-made clothier's, or as a sailor would express it, "been to the slop chest," I was able to undeceive them and prove myself somewhat of a salt and a man-of-war's man after all, by a few hours' acquaintance and my appearance in a new uniform.

The steamer "Flag" was commanded by Commander James C. Williamson, better known in the navy as "Old Pap." He was one of those old fogies of whom there were not a few, who at the breaking out of the rebellion had been a lieutenant for forty years or upwards, and who would have died or been laid on the shelf with the same rank had it not been for vacancies caused by the war. He had never attained any very great reputation as a naval officer, possibly from the fact that he was never very well liked by his shipmates, and it was said he was so mean that his own shadow would not follow him. I will not vouch for the truth of what I heard a man say once, that while the captain was going down the ladder his shadow went over the side of the ship and was

drowned, so that he never had any afterward. There were some hard stories told about him, principally by the surgeon and paymaster, who messed with him and who were willing to be invited to dine with other officers three times a day. It was difficult to tell to what navy he belonged by his dress, from the fact that he always wore some old-fashioned uniform—sometimes the short-waisted pigeon-tailed coat that belonged to some deceased classmate when he was a midshipman, and with his pantaloons at half-mast. The other officers were all volunteers except the chief engineer, and if we occasionally did not observe the strict naval regulations it was thought no harm.

The vessel was sixteen hundred tons burden, full barque rigged and a screw steamer. Her name, previous to her purchase by the government, was the Phineas Sprague, and she belonged to the Boston and New Orleans line of steamers. The officers, crew and marines numbered two hundred and seven men. Her armament was one ten-inch Dahlgren pivot gun, two fifty-pounder rifled pivot guns, and eight thirty-two-pounder broadside guns, with the usual quantity of small arms. The officers quarters were pleasant

and spacious — more so than are allowed to regular war vessels — the rooms having been fitted for the convenience of passengers. The lower hold was used for storing coal, and the freight deck formed what is called on a man-of-war the berth deck, or quarters for the seamen. The vessel was very comfortable and pleasant for all on board.

We sailed from Boston Friday, December 6th, and to old salts, who are not the least superstitious of people, we were to have bad luck the whole cruise. The following night we put into Vineyard Haven, where we remained until the morning of the eighth, when the weather cleared and we hove anchor, and in a few hours were out upon the ocean out of sight of land. Our voyage was favored with the most delightful weather, and the change into a southern climate at that season of the year was enjoyed by all on board.

During the forenoon of the second day, a full rigged clipper ship hove in sight at leeward and rapidly gained upon us. The day was as bright and beautiful as was ever seen in mid-ocean, and the questions of her overhauling us when we were steaming four-

teen knots an hour, or whether a sailing vessel could beat a steamer, were fully discussed. About the middle of the afternoon all arguments were decided, for the vessel passed us within hailing distance, while we were admiring the evenly cut lines of her model, her full rig and all sail drawing in a fourteen-knot breeze. Our captain gave the usual hail, "Ship ahoy?" "Aye, aye, sir." "What ship is that?" "American ship Ocean Queen, two days from Boston, bound for Yokahama." Imagine the dignity of our captain, in command of a United States steamer, and his mortification, when the skipper of a sailing vessel sings out with a laugh, "Captain, if you have the mail on board, I will take it down for you." Three days later, while we were passing Cape Hatteras, we caught up with the vessel. The sea was as calm as a mill-pond, and there was hardly wind enough, as a sailor would say, to raise a pennant. The ship was almost motionless. As our vessel passed near her, our captain enquired: "Are you bound for Yokahama?" "Yes, sir." "No fresh meat aboard, I suppose, sir;" and we passed on without seeing each other again.

In another day we reported off Charleston, South

Carolina, to Admiral Dahlgren, (John A.,) commanding the South Atlantic Blockading Squadron, and were assigned our station on the outside blockade. Now our duties began. Our first anchorage was three miles from the coast, at the entrance to the north channel of Charleston harbor. The daily routine of drill and changing anchorage at night were regularly carried on without interruption until an expedition was made to Georgetown. I never knew the object of this attack, but it may be called a specimen of Admiral Dahlgren's secret expeditions. In the first place, to carry out the secrecy of the plans, all the boats in the squadron were got together and a steam tug towed them up and down the lines in full view of the enemy in broad daylight; the transports were loaded with troops from Morris Island, who were shouting and cheering loud enough to be heard in Richmond. At night we were expected to sail off and by surprise capture something or somebody—no one knew which. The first signal for us to get up anchor was the discharge of a heavy cannon; and to start, a rocket was sent up. To prevent accidents by vessels colliding, we all set our top and side lights,

each vessel exchanged signals by use of rockets and colored fires, and thus the expedition proceeded up the coast, I presume to surprise the enemy, who must have thought the Yankees had sent down a procession of Lincoln wide-a-wakes, or some other torch-light procession. But I think the admiral must have been the most surprised, for when we neared the shore at Georgetown, we were saluted with shotted cannon, to aid us in the effect of our torch-light procession I suppose, by adding a few bursting shells, and the fleet, not being able to operate in the narrow channel, put to sea and anchored until morning. Then two or three of the fastest vessels had a race along the coast. The transports landed their troops where they had taken them on board, and this exciting expedition was ended.

It may be thought that vessels on the blockade encounter none of the dangers of war. But we could never lie down at night thinking we were out of danger. Not only were we exposed to the storms of wind and sea by which many vessels were wrecked on the enemy's shores, but subject to a momentary summons to save our lives from the attack of that terribly des-

tructive machine, the submarine torpedo. The vessels usually lay at anchor, with the anchor ready to slip by a joint in the cable, and a full head of steam was always kept up in the boilers, so that we were prepared to start under full speed at a moment's notice, while lookouts that could be relied upon, were stationed in all parts of the vessel.

Our first experience of night alarms came in the form of a floating torpedo which had been made to drift out upon the tide from Charleston. The sloop-of-war Housatonic, sister ship to the famous Kearsage, was destroyed by one of these during the night while at anchor only a short distance from our vessel, and more than half her crew perished. So constantly were these alarms and so frequently the results fatal, that I wished very often I was at home or in some safer part of the world. While I have been a member of this society, I have listened with great pleasure to the several accounts of night alarms, and to give you an idea of what we many times experienced in the navy, I will copy from a letter written at the time to my parents, an account of one of these torpedo attacks :

It was about midnight; I lay slumbering in my bunk, when I was awakened by an unusual excitement on deck, and while I was yet in stupor, trying to realize the cause, I heard our strong-hearted boatswain's mate in the greatest excitement run forward, shouting, "Slip the cable! slip the cable!" In a moment I was on my feet, and seeing that no alarm had been given below, I sprang to the rattle, and giving the machine a whirl, rushed to the spar deck. There was a dim moonlight and the sea was calm. Near us and to the windward, I saw bearing down upon us a floating object that filled every soul with dread. We were casting loose a broadside gun, when I heard the same boatswain's mate, who stood on the forecastle, shout again, "Back her! back her! for God's sake back her; she is right under our bows." I jumped into the netting, took a view of the clouds, expecting to take my next breath among the stars, and stood on tip-toe waiting the ascent; but as the vessel backed, the torpedo boat glided in the swift current of the tide harmlessly past. A shot from one of our guns cut it in two, and the torpedo proved to be a mass of floating sea-weed. The first salute was by my friend, Mr. Boyland, who had been crowded from the opportunity himself, shouting: "Just look at Butts, up there in the rigging in his shirt-tail!" But I turned the joke by calling his attention to the shirt tails on the quarter deck and to the master-at-arms, who in his haste had run both legs into the sleeves of a pea-jacket and had the skirt buttoned around his body.

The most hazardous duty we had to perform while on the blockade was picket duty in Charleston har-

bor, and I may say knowingly, that there was no duty performed during the whole war, in either land or sea service, that was attended with so much toil, exposure and peril as this duty compelled us to endure. We had been but a few weeks on the blockade, when we received orders to send a boat, with an officer and its complement of men, to the inner harbor for picket duty. This was the first boat that had left the ship, and I asked permission to accompany it. My answer from the executive officer was, "I will let you go to-morrow night." I was delighted with his answer and anxiously watched the weather, and waited for the morrow's eve. It came, and when the crew had been selected, I reported to the lieutenant with all the dignity of some distinguished passenger, when he informed me that I would take charge of the boat and report to Commodore Green on board the ship Paul Jones for orders. I was quite surprised to know I was to be the ranking officer of that craft, and thought it quite a compliment to be placed in so responsible a command. It was six miles to the flag-ship, and not until sunset did I reach the vessel. I stepped into the cabin and saluted the commodore with all the po-

liteness I could manage, which was returned with a very hoarse "Hem! You are from the Flag, are you? How long have you been in the service? Ever done any fighting?" I gave my record as completely as possible, and when my speech was ended he gave me my orders in this way: "You will report to the Commander of the Passaic, get the countersign; a tug will tow the pickets into the harbor, and when it is dark enough to be favorable, go as near Charleston as you can; if you see a blockade-runner, send up a rocket; if you see a torpedo boat and cannot arrest it, burn a blue light; if you see any suspicious craft, burn a red; and if you see a picket boat, make them give the countersign or capture them." I raised my cap, and sliding backwards out of the cabin, thought what a muss I had got into if all these things were to happen.

I reported to Commander Rodgers, (C. R. P.,) as ordered, and our boat, with several others, was towed up the harbor, nearly to the obstruction crossing the channel between Forts Sumter and Moultrie. I learned from officers who were accustomed to the duty, that this was about the cruising ground and

that we were not expected to go further in towards the city. Besides having arms for the men, we were equipped with a compass, a dark lantern and a tinder-box. We cruised about below the obstructions for an hour or two, when it became tedious, and I made up my mind that that sort of fooling was nonsense, and as the commodore had told me to go as near Charleston as I could, I thought he did not mean going to sea as far as we could, as we seemed to be doing, so I changed our course. The only light visible was a calcium from the ship Ironsides, which at intervals shone up the harbor and gave us our course. I was familiar with the charts of the harbor, and having seven of the best men and a light boat, felt confident if we got squeezed we could make our escape, for it is not easy to follow a small boat on the water except in daylight. The picket boats were provided with half a pint of whiskey for each man and about a quart for the officer in charge, which is about the usual proportion of that encouraging ration. I dealt out an allowance to the men, scratched my back with the bottle, put the boat about and in a few minutes

crossed the obstructions and ran the boat straight for Charleston.

I cannot tell how near I went to the city, but we could plainly hear the machinery of some manufactory and could distinguish voices ; and as we could expect to see nothing, we turned about. The current was running swiftly towards the sea, and had we so wished we could have glided rapidly out, but it was then only one o'clock — a long time before light — and we concluded to take a look at Castle Thunder and Fort Pinckney. We glided past and very near to them, but everything seemed dead within. We then ran for Fort Sumter. We saw several of the enemy's picket boats and I suppose they saw us, but we did not go within hail, for I did not want to give up the countersign there, nor did I care to know theirs. If I had been disposed, I could have hailed one of them and been answered with their countersign before we were suspected, but any futher conversation might have betrayed us. The orders of our own pickets were to overhaul every boat we saw, but the enemy this night, as happened several times after, always avoided being approached, and our picket boats

were as safe in the rebel waters as in our own. I have been accused of attacking Fort Sumter with seven men, but the truth of the affair was this: We attempted to get a brick or some relic from this immortal structure, and while we were feeling our way in the shoal water near the fort, we were hailed from Sumter, and before we could get a start the sentry sent a bullet whistling over our heads. In less than a minute the whole heavens was ablaze with bursting shell from Fort Wagner, and a heavy cannonading was kept up between the two forts for nearly an hour, and no one except those in my boat knew what caused the rumpus. As day approached and it grew light, we drifted toward the fleet, and after going on board the flag-ship, I made my report to the commodore. Although the position I held had really no connection with this kind of duty, I was called upon a great many times to explore the waters of Charleston harbor, and my first night's picket duty was followed by many similar incidents and nights of exposure in storms and heavy seas that would now seem impossible for me to endure.

In order that you may understand exactly how this

duty was performed, and how different it was from picket duty in the army, I will explain it more thoroughly. The picket boats were divided into three classes. The boats of the first class, which I represented, were called the scout boats. They were light, sharp built and single banked, carrying five oarsmen, one coxswain and one officer—in all, seven men. There was not often more than one of these boats out the same night, and their duties were principally to get behind the enemy's line of pickets, which crossed the entrance of the harbor between Forts Sumter and Moultrie, where the enemy had placed obstructions, which I always thought were imagined by our people to be more formidable than they really were, and I doubt if anything more than a few torpedoes or some temporary rubbish ever obstructed the passage. These boats were often engaged in taking soundings, which was difficult work and the results were unreliable in most instances, as, owing to the darkness and secrecy required, they could not locate themselves, and although Sumter always could be seen like a shadow on the horizon, we could not tell with any accuracy how near, or in what direction we

were from it. We were equipped and prepared to fight, but we never made an attack, and depended on our fleetness to avoid capture. Our other duties were to explore the harbor near the city and watch the movements of any blockade-runners that were trying to escape, and to provide against a surprise by the rebel iron-clads.

The second class of picket boats were the usual man-of-war boats, called cutters, carrying nine men, who cruised in front of the enemy's line and were prepared to fight or run, whichever was expedient, and to kick up a rumpus whenever they saw an enemy's boat.

The third class were large boats known as launches, carrying fourteen or sixteen men each, and sometimes a boat howitzer. They were kept in readiness to assist other boats, and to arrest torpedoes. It was not unusual to hear an exchange of shots by these pickets, or a loud volley, indicating a close attack, and many times were some of our boats captured by the enemy, or some of theirs gobbled up by us. Our boats always had the advantage from the fact that they were manned by perfect seamen who could han-

dle themselves and their boat with better skill than the undrilled men of the enemy. It is impossible for any one to imagine how fatiguing this kind of duty was for our seamen. There was always a swift current in Charleston harbor, so that the men could not for a moment stop rowing, and if the weather chanced to be stormy and the sea rough, more vigilance was required, and the eight or ten hours' duty and labor would so completely exhaust them that they seemed hardly to have strength enough to get out of their boats.

The whole operation in the attack on Charleston seemed to be carried on inefficiently and unsuccessfully, and there seems to me no excuse for our not occupying Fort Sumter, which, of course, would have speedily led to the capture of Fort Moultrie and the city of Charleston. It always seemed to me that after the walls of Sumter had been so thoroughly demolished as they were, there might have been boats and pontoons enough brought into the harbor after dark, and sufficient troops landed on the ruins of the fort the same night, to have easily carried and captured it. The failure of the first attack and all subsequent pre-

tences, were owing, according to my view, to the manner of exposing operations as I have described in our attack on Georgetown, and the enemy were too well prepared for us.

From the beginning of operations by our land forces on Morris Island, I could not understand why the attack on Fort Wagner was so mis-managed as to allow one regiment — the Fifty-fourth Massachusetts — to charge on the fort, and after reaching the parapets, and with the fort within their grasp, to afford them no support, or at least not sufficient support, to have swept everything before them, instead of allowing those brave and patriotic men to be slaughtered. So far as the naval attack was concerned it was a success. I have heard statements that the enemy cared nothing for our monitors, because while we were reloading our guns they could shovel back all the earth removed by an exploded shell. This cannot be true, because a monitor of two guns could discharge and reload both guns in less than four minutes, and how much time could they have had when seven of these vessels were engaged. The facts are conclusive, for the enemy was glad to

evacuate, and the walls of the fort were found to be nearly level with the earth when our troops took possession. I very well remember a description of the attack by a contraband whom I met on the island in 1864, and I will try to relate it: "I wus working thar wid a heap of other niggers and dem monetors come up. The rebs thought they wus goin to knock blazes out of them wid a lot of old cannons they got out of Sumter. This nigger was scared and begun to shake. I seed a big smoke and den, de lord! I thought, I thought the Yankees had chucked a cotton-bale at us! She come right in and struck in de sand, side de fort, den she busted! Great heavens, massa, you ought to see dem niggers git!"

The attack on the forts in Charleston harbor by the seven iron-clads was never equalled in naval history. Here these vessels came to anchor within eight hundred and one thousand yards of three massive fortifications. Fort Wagner is known as one of the strongest of earthworks, which are acknowledged to be more invulnerable than the heaviest masonry, and could be repaired in the dark hours during a siege. Forts Sumter and Moultrie were constructed in the most

solid and substantial manner of modern engineering, with all the improvements in casemating and heavy cannon that science could suggest, and Sumter, forming as it does an artificial island, commanded every possible entrance of the channel. The rebels themselves say they could bring one hundred guns to bear on a single point, and yet day after day our vessels renewed the attack, until Wagner was evacuated and Sumter demolished. When was there ever a parallel case? The Weehawken was struck four hundred and fourteen times, almost entirely by solid shot, and she expended more than three thousand rounds of ammunition. The other vessels did no less, and yet Fort Sumter was never captured.

Our blockade duty had numerous changes. We captured two "runners." One of these was given back to the owners, who pretended they were laboring to get out of the Confederacy and their cargo was taken on board to cover up suspicion and intended for a northern port. The second was disposed of by the government, and I received forty-nine dollars and ninety-seven cents as my share in the prize. Occasionally we would get sight of a runner during the

day, which had come up to sight the land for a sure entry at night, and an exciting chase, lasting usually until dark, served to enliven us.

About the middle of August, 1864, we received orders to proceed to Ossabaw Sound to relieve the vessel there, and make it our future station. When we arrived we found ourselves in a pleasant little sound at the mouth of the Ogeechee river. The landscape here was as beautiful as ever seen on a southern shore. At the east was the broad, open sea, from the edge of which the sun would rise with all the calmness and beauty of an ocean scene. At the north was Ossabaw Island, covered with the thick evergreen of live oaks and palmettos. Then a broad expanse of low lands, through which we could trace the course of the Big Ogeechee, and far beyond in the distance were dotted here and there the dwellings of southern planters. Southward a sand-bar, left naked by the change of tide, stretched several miles into the sea, and hundreds of pelicans and other sea fowl could be seen seated upon the sand and hovering over their prey. There the sea, in all the splendor of an ocean surf, rolled and splashed upon the beach, send-

ing its spray far above the shore; and beyond in the distance, at the edge of the horizon, stood the masts and rigging of a companion ship, at St. Catherine Sound.

Here, on the first day of our arrival, there was as sad an accident as often occurred in the service. One of our seamen, while seated in a port-hole, leaned over for some purpose with his weight on the shelf. The lanyard holding it up gave way, and he fell forward into the sea. Just as he arose to the surface of the water, a monstrous shark darted from beneath the ship, biting him in two, and in another instant the remaining portion of his body was swallowed by another. He was known to us as James Webster, but in a moment of confidence he had told a shipmate that through some foolish and trifling act he had mortified his parents, and to hide himself from the world he had left his home, and that Webster was an assumed name. The army and navy, in addition to those who went forth from noble and patriotic impulses, received hundreds who, sinking through some misfortune from the higher social levels, sought to bury in camp or on the deck of the ship their shame

or their despair. Some of the saddest secrets of earth are buried in the soldiers' graves, or have gone down at sea with the shotted hammock. On the ship's books appear this brief record : "James Webster, drowned." What a history lay beneath this short statement! A story of a wasted life and of broken hearts. Such homes as the death of James Webster made desolate, are those on which the darkest sorrows of the war have fallen, for no ray of glory comes through the thick shadow of death. How often some such brief record of the war has for a few hearts terrible meanings of which the world knows nothing. What might be called the domestic history of the war, would perhaps be one of more thrilling interest than the story of its campaigns, its battles and its victories.

We found our situation to be the most desirable on the whole blockade. Bordering the sea coast, were numerous islands, and very many times have we enjoyed ourselves rambling over them. We received fresh provision, and the mail every third or fourth week, and often for that purpose some one would be dispatched by a land route across Wassaw Island,

where, at the mouth of the Savannah river, a number of vessels were awaiting the attack of the rebel iron-clads. The method of forwarding the mails was for each vessel to pass it to another—not often along this coast were they beyond signal distance, although to follow the channel a boat would be obliged sometimes to go twenty miles.

The most eventful trip across Wassaw Island was performed by myself, and I will give a sketch of how it occurred: Early one morning in December, 1864, we were all taken by surprise at seeing two men in a small boat, rowing out from the Ogeechee river. A boat was lowered, and the first lieutenant in charge started in pursuit. The fugitives, as we supposed them to be, turned about and were making haste for the shore, when our lieutenant unfurled the boat ensign, and as he waved it above his head we heard three joyous cheers from the two companions, and in a few moments more they were greeted on board the Flag, as the advance scouts of Sherman's army.

While all through the north our loyal people were trembling in suspense at Sherman's absence, not knowing when or under what circumstances he would

first be heard from, these two scouts were greeted with the greatest joy, bringing as they did the assurance that he would soon join us and that the campaign would be a success. We hailed their arrival with a salute from our ten-inch gun, hoping its echoes might reach the ears of their daring commander. Each half hour during the day, and until the army appeared, we fired a shot, the designated signal that we were ready to receive them. Our captain prepared dispatches for the admiral, and I was instructed to deliver them with others from General Sherman, at Wassaw Sound.

I was landed on Wassaw Island just as the sun had gone down, and immediately started on my journey. The usual route was to follow the beach to the north end of the island; but I had crossed it several times in the daytime and thought it could be done easily enough at night. The island was uninhabited. Thick growths of palmetto and Spanish dagger grew in patches over the soil, while in the marshy places heavy live oak and thick undergrowths of scrub covered the island. It grew dark very rapidly, as is usual in the south, and in passing through one of

these jungles I lost my bearings and had to guess my way I took a course, as near as I could calculate, for the north, and soon found myself at the edge of a small stream. I knew of there being a creek on the western side of the island, and thought by crossing it I could continue on my way towards the north. I pulled off my clothing, and holding it with my papers and side-arms with one hand over my head, plunged into the stream and was soon on the opposite side. I dressed myself and for a long distance tramped through one of those southern marshes which border the coast of South Carolina and Georgia. Knowing there was none such on the island, I discovered that I had swam to the main land. If any of you were ever lost in the night, without any landmark to guide you, you can perhaps imagine what my feelings were at that moment. The ground was moist, and clots of clay would hang to my shoes until I was forced to remove it with my hands. There was a thin growth of tall grass and wild rice, through which were muddy paths made by wild hogs and alligators, and so crooked that I could see both ends of a curve not a dozen feet from me. These are the marshes that are sometimes im-

proved in the south for rice plantations. The sky was clouded, but I could distinguish a light portion, which I thought must be north, and kept on in that direction. I would have turned back, but I knew the Savannah river was north, which would surely direct me, and judging the distance I had travelled and the thoughts of the cold bath I would be obliged to undergo again, I kept tramping until I got out of the swamp, and found myself on a good road. As I was passing the slave quarters of a large plantation, the lights of a city suddenly burst upon me. Then I sat down to rest myself and think what I should do. "The city must be Savannah, which is west. Yonder are the rebel fortifications on the river. The enemy's camps are below me." Then I knew I was inside the enemy's lines and must get out before day or wait until another night. I took my bearings and started off, cautiously approaching any road, for I knew that they were guarded, as I had passed a picket post and saw a hut with the usual log fire and a soldier standing near it.

My route was as near east as I could travel. Passing over cotton fields and other cultivated land, most

of the way, I arrived at a point of land between the Savannah river and a river west of Ossabaw Island. It soon grew light enough for me to see the vessels in the fleet, and I discharged one of my revolvers to attract their attention. Very soon I saw a boat lowered from the iron-clad Patapsco, which was stationed up the river as advanced picket, to which vessel I was taken and very hospitably received. As soon as I had made known my message, everybody on board was awake, and the news was hailed with great delight. The paymaster, who came on deck when my firing was heard, was the kindest-hearted fellow I ever met. He took me to his room, gave me a generous glass, which I truly needed, and opening his bunk told me to lie there until I was rested and ready to return. I thoroughly appreciated his kindness, for it was the first and only time I was ever treated with any sort of decency among strangers on a scout or as carrier of messages. This, my friends, is the means by which the first news from General Sherman, after he left Chattanooga, reached your ears.

A steamer that was dispatched to Ossabaw, con-

veyed me back to my vessel. Transports loaded with provisions that had been ordered for General Sherman's army began to arrive, and Ossabaw Sound presented as commercial an appearance as New York. Among the arrivals were a number of mortar vessels, and thinking that something would be done in the direction of Fort McAllister, I was granted permission to accompany one of them. I left the ship for several days and enjoyed the pleasure of a roving commission ; that is, I could go where I pleased. The first operations were against an earthwork at the mouth of the Little Ogeechee river. This earthwork, known as Fort Beaula, was situated on a high bluff, near which were several houses used as summer resorts by some of the wealthy people of Savannah. The fort was heavily casemated and in a pleasant grove. In the rear were very substantial and snug quarters for the garrison. The mortar fleet took position behind a curve in the river, and a second day's bombardment reduced the fort, the enemy evacuating it. We had no landing force, but kept the enemy from re-occupying it for a day or two, when we saw a squad of Sherman's bummers, followed by a number of wagons and

all sorts of vehicles that those fellows had appropriated for conveyance. The small vessels moved up the river, and a large party of men went on shore. We had more fun that night than on any other night in my army or navy experience, and I think Sherman's bummers lost their reputation when our sailors joined them. I wish I could tell all I saw in those few days. We occupied the houses near the fort, which were filled with furniture and other valuable goods that had been moved from Savannah, either at the capture of Fort Pulaski, or at the contemplated advance of General Sherman, or both. The shores were completely bedded with large fine oysters, and the sailors soon became favorites with the whole army, for not one of those hoosiers could get an oyster out of the shell, but they would suck them down like a bear eating honey, when we opened the bivalves for them. I think all the sailors on the blockade could have been employed in that way until this time if the army had not moved.

I cannot describe all that went on in those houses that night, but if you could have looked in, the scene would have been about thus presented : On the hearth,

in the largest room, was piled a heap of flaming furniture, while around its edges and in the crevices, oysters were placed and replaced by a dozen half-starved soldiers, who would devour them like wolves and curse because they were so all-fired hot. At the side of the room were a soldier and a sailor, dancing in no gentle manner on top of a pearl-keyed piano, while a comrade, with his coat-tail burned off up to the waist, occupied the stool, and another, with the treadle in his arms, was drumming away trying to strike a tune. On the floor were half a dozen more stretched out for a nap, who, finding no peace to their slumbers, would alternately join in the racket; and so the night was howled away.

A day or two later the main army appeared. The rebel flag was still floating over Fort McAllister. The day was as bright and balmy as is often seen in a southern winter. I heard the bugle sound the assembly, and the echoes sent back shrill notes from distant brigades. I saw the men rushing to their different commands as if there was something peculiar in the sound of their own music. Soon on the edge of the woods long lines of infantry appeared.

The drums roll, the bugles sound again. The troops move forward with an earnest and steady tread and another line appears. The cannon in the fort now belch forth fire and smoke. The battle has begun. The bugles sound again and the men increase their steps. Now I see the shot pass through their ranks and shell burst over them. The bugles sound the charge, which causes a shudder. Forward, with bayonets lowered, to the front dashes this human mass, leaving the path marked with the mangled and dead. Then over the obstructions and down into the ditch. I see them swept by heavy charges of canister from guns on the angles of the fort. Then up the walls and on the parapet, a hand to hand conflict ensues. Then down into the fort among the cannoneers when sword and bayonet are thrust and parried, to conquer or die. Hurrah ! my heart leaps out. I hear the cheers of our own men, and see the rebel flag hauled down.

The army was soon supplied with provision and moved on again in its course. The rebel iron-clads on the Savannah were captured ; Charleston and Wilmington had fallen ; the sea coast from Maryland to Mexico was thrown open, and our cruise along the blockade was over.

